# **Organizing Your Neighborhood**

# I. What is a Neighborhood Organization?

A Neighborhood Organization is a group of neighbors who organize, formally or informally, to help improve the quality of life in their neighborhood.

## II. Why organize?

- 1. To build relationships with neighbors.
- 2. To create a unified voice at City Hall.
- 3. To strengthen communication within the neighborhood.
- 4. To accomplish neighborhood goals most effectively.

#### III. Getting Organized:

- 1. If an organization already exists, (i.e. Neighborhood Watch, Neighborhood Advisory Committee, informal block club) great! These organizations should not be ignored, but are often "single focus" groups that come together for a defined purpose and can cover very large geographic areas. These existing groups can offer the opportunity for a range of partnerships with existing leadership and resources.
- 2. If there are no existing neighborhood organizations or if you choose to form a group more tailored to your neighborhood, begin by identifying two or three neighbors willing to help you as part of an "organization committee." Meet with this committee to discuss:
  - Selection of a temporary group leader.
  - Suggested topics for agenda/goals of an organization. Residents need an issue to organize around such a s neighborhood clean-up, tree problems, crime, disaster preparedness, traffic, etc. Avoid being narrow in focus, as the group will soon loose interest and begin to dwindle.
  - Set a place and time for a neighborhood meeting. (A centrally located home, community center, or school. A time during the week just after dinner works best.)
  - Distribute fliers. (See sample, page 15)
  - If time permits, talk to neighbors one-on-one and informally survey them. The survey would include things like their ideas, concerns, suggestions for addressing concerns, convenient times to hold meetings, how frequently to meet, special social events they would be interested in, and neighborhood projects.
  - Identify other prospective leaders in your neighborhood and get them involved.
  - Decide on temporary neighborhood boundaries and select possible name or names for your neighborhood organization/group to present at the first meeting. This is for your first few meetings and may change over time.
  - Be sure to plan refreshments! People like to be fed!
  - If you need some coaching, check out the 15 minute video "Running Good Meetings" from the Office of Neighborhoods and view it before holding your first meeting or ask the Office of Neighborhoods to help plan and attend your first meeting too!

### **IV.** First Meeting

- 1. Supplies
  - Agenda (See sample 1<sup>st</sup> meeting agenda, page 12; sample later meeting agenda page 13)
  - Sign-in sheet
  - Name tags
  - Refreshments
- 2. Temporary group leader moderates the first meeting.
  - Go around the room and make introductions (where they live, kids, etc.)
  - Tell why core group came together
  - Discuss functions of a neighborhood organization
  - Discuss organizational structure (Chairperson, recording secretary, street captains, other)
- 3. Selection of Chairperson
- 4. Discuss neighborhood issues
  - Solicit ideas, concerns from group.
  - Suggest social events or projects the neighborhood can sponsor or be involved in.
  - Select street captains or block captains for communication at street level.
  - Form committees regarding the above and report back at next meeting. Subcommittees may include: Goals, projects, welcome to new neighbors, membership, newsletter, and issue resolution, code compliance, education
  - Decide on next meeting date, time, and place.
  - SOCIAL TIME: provide refreshments and time to mingle before or after the meeting. (Having refreshments available as people arrive is probably best.)

By roughly following these guidelines, organizational structure will be in place. A means of communication will be set and a sense of leadership and organization will also begin. Structure, leadership, and organization are important to ensure a cohesive and proactive organization. Organizing your neighborhood is a process of self-reliance. It is an avenue for networking with neighbors, making friends, watching out for each other and enhancing the quality of life for everyone in your neighborhood.

Last but not least: Fill out the Neighborhood Organization registration form on the next page and mail or fax it to the City of Riverside's Office of Neighborhoods. They will be happy to assist you in answering any questions or helping you set up your first meeting.

**♦** 

In the following pages, please find materials that will facilitate the organization of your neighborhood organization. These materials include:

- Information on developing a work plan
- Information on developing ideas and working with volunteers
- Operating procedures
- Sample bylaws
- Agenda and newsletter formats along with a telephone tree
- A map of the neighborhoods in the City of Riverside
- Information on the City of Riverside's Neighborhood Matching Grant program
- Information on the Riverside Neighborhood Partnership

Keep your rules and procedures loose and inclusive. Don't be afraid to request assistance and...

...Best of Luck!

